

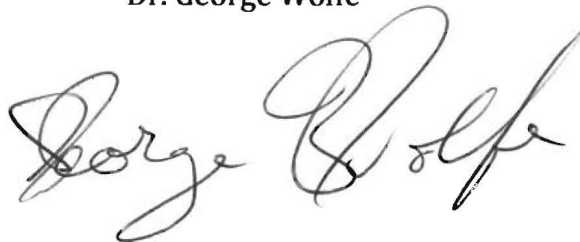
Music and Mythology

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

Chris Jones

Thesis Advisor
Dr. George Wolfe

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "George Wolfe". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Thesis Advisor Dr. George Wolfe".

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Abstract

Mythology has been a central aspect since the birth of civilization. These stories convey higher truths that can be expressed through music. Many have significant connections to Christianity and other religions. Ryo Noda and Benjamin Britten used mythology to inspire their works *Phoenix* and *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* respectively. Through analysis and interpretation, the imagery of their myths is portrayed through performance. Mythology also has implications in religion that reveal its purpose. Mythology inspires many cultures and is necessary for advancing society.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. George Wolfe for serving as my advisor and mentor for this honors project. Dr. Wolfe has guided me in my music career and has helped me succeed in performing this difficult task.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for supporting me during my recital.

Author's Note

The main medium I used for my thesis was performing a solo saxophone recital on December 8, 2012. I used the recital to explore mythological story telling through music and showcase my skills as an accomplished musician. I performed two piano-accompanied saxophone solos entitled *Divertimento* by Roger Boutry and *Prelude Cadence y Finale* by Alfred Desenclos, which were not part of my thesis topic. These pieces served as showcases for my musicianship. The middle two works featured in my recital were *Phoenix* by Ryo Noda and *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* by Benjamin Britten. These pieces are based off of myths that tell a story within the music. I interpreted this story by performing the piece according to my own analysis of the works. After studying four years of music analysis, I recognized the music techniques and incorporated them into my performance. During the recital, I introduced each piece with background on the respective myth and the imagery the composer intended. In my thesis paper, I introduce mythology as stories based on truth with some examples of its origins in different cultures. After the presentation and analysis of the featured works, I consider the implications that mythology has on religion and more specifically Christianity. I make a proposition that explains the importance and purpose of mythology. I conclude that mythology is vital to for advancement and is a key component to defining society.

Thesis Outline
May 3, 2013

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Introduction

Mythology thrives at the center of nearly every culture and civilization to date. The origins of myth and legend are born out of many different events, but the embellishments of such historical times are what really define an ideal. These stories become passed down through the ages, expanding into new revelations that grow to instruct and inspire different cultures. Though language is the most widely used source of spreading such knowledge, music has become an outlet for the expression of mythology. As a universal language, music has the ability to express the aesthetic value found in all good stories. This thesis examines the image of the Phoenix as depicted in a composition by the same title by Japanese composer Ryo Noda. Benjamin Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* is also discussed. The listener is given a new means of experiencing their messages and witnessing the power of storytelling through the medium of music. Additionally, connections between mythology and Christianity are examined to support the claim that mythology is rooted in truth. Historical events spark an idea, which expands into a legacy that defines a culture.

Mythology: An Overview

Near the beginning of the 19th century, the word *myth* began to replace the word *fable* in dictionaries and encyclopedias. This change sparked three different transformations in the anatomy of what a myth would become. First, myths, which were once thought of as being solely fictional tales rooted mainly in uneducated people groups, became identified with the start of historical lines of history.¹

Second, the narrative characteristics of myth were becoming reduced and replaced with human reasoning. This reasoning being associated with the origins of historical accounts led to the acceptance of myths possessing useful expressions of truth and thereby a practical means of deciphering reality.² Some myths are invented from the creative mind of a poet or philosopher. Society accepts their stories and publishes them as they were written. Their popularity stems from the meaning of the story and genius of the story's creator. But ancient myths do not start in this way. Ancient stories are born out of legend, being told by different people over the course of centuries. These stories begin to travel and spread across countries, empires, and continents. Then they are borrowed, reshaped, and retold often times to serve the local community. The origins of Greek myths reflect the history at the time, based on the religion and culture.³

According to anthropologists, Greek myths started as simple narratives involving a few characters and an underlying plot. Greek myths have become some of the most popular lore in the world because these stories are mostly based on historical events and have been embellished to include abstract ideas and events. This is one reason why modern myth has sometimes come to be known as a "traditional story with social implications."⁴

The Trojan War, for example, is one of the most famous wars in Greek mythology. The characters of Agamemnon, Helen, and Hector captured the attention of readers in Homer's *Iliad* and led to several movies, including *Troy*. Much of Homer's epic may have been fiction, but the likelihood of the characters and events being based on historical events is quite strong. The physical city of Troy has

not been confirmed, but scholars still argue that the legends may be based on different battles between the Greeks and the Trojans between 1500 and 1200 B.C. While it cannot be confirmed as to whether *The Iliad* is an epic based on an actual Trojan war, we can rest in the fact that the myths that grew so rapidly in popularity might have been rooted in actual historical events.⁵ Homer's inspiration can still be taken seriously and readers in the twentieth century can gain valuable knowledge from his legends.

Outside of the prominent influence of Greek mythology, there are numerous cultures whose practices and beliefs developed independently. Before Christianity came to the ancient Mayans, there were documented accounts of the possible origins of all life. Near the end of the 17th century, an unknown Mayan scribe described "the world history of the era." He had explanations for the destruction and rebirth of the cosmos including where gods, humans, and rituals come from. The Mayans based their well-known calendar off of the dawn of the sun, which had Americans talking about the possible significance of the year 2012. We call accounts like these "creation myths" and label their procurer as a "mythographer." Eventually this compilation of myths became part of the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel.⁶ The history and practices found in this book became the foundation of the Mayan culture, which all stemmed from a certain line of "mythology" that brought about such history.⁷

The Myth of the Phoenix

Ryo Noda's composition *Phoenix* is based on the myth of a sacred firebird. Found in the Hindu scripture known as the Rig Veda, the phoenix is a magnificent bird of fire that resurrects itself to embody the continuity of life. Flying from the sun, it comes down to earth and lives anywhere from 500 to 1000 years. Near the end of its life, it builds itself a nest and then ignites. Both the bird and nest are burned down to ash and a young phoenix is reborn from the ashes. In some versions of the myth, the new phoenix preserves the ashes of its former life in its egg of myrrh and then takes it to the Egyptian city of Heliopolis (meaning "sun-city" in Greek). The following is a description of the phoenix by the Roman poet Ovid.

Most beings spring from other individuals; but there is a certain kind, which reproduces itself. The Assyrians call it the Phoenix. It does not live on fruit or flowers, but on frankincense and odoriferous gums. When it has lived five hundred years, it builds itself a nest in the branches of an oak, or on the top of a palm tree. In this it collects cinnamon, and spikenard, and myrrh, and of these materials builds a pile on which it deposits itself, and dying, breathes out its last breath amidst odors. From the body of the parent bird, a young phoenix issues forth, destined to live as long a life as its predecessor. When this has grown up and gained sufficient strength, it lifts its nest from the tree and carries it to the city of Heliopolis in Egypt, and deposits it in the temple of the Sun.⁸

The Egyptians originally thought of the phoenix as a stork-like bird called a "benu," which was closely associated with the rising sun (giving new life each day) and the Egyptian sun-god Ra. In Greek mythology, the phoenix was imagined as more of an eagle that lived in Phoenicia next to a well. The Greek sun-god Helios would stop his chariot (the sun) next to the well to listen to the bird's beautiful song.

The most significant association with the phoenix has been its symbolism for rebirth and immortality. In Christian art and literature, the sunbird has been

represented by an eagle to symbolize spiritual ascension. In the Hebrew book of Deuteronomy, Moses talks of how God leads and cares for His people: “like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The Lord alone led him; no foreign god was with him” (Deut. 32: 11-12).⁹ This passage implies that when suffering and death may disrupt a person’s life, the Lord will carry them to safety and ultimately to eternal life. Additionally, a passage in the book of Malachi reads: “the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its *wings*” (Mal 4: 2- italics mine).¹⁰ This references the regenerative powers the phoenix possesses in addition to the ascension to new life. George Wolfe points out that the phoenix myth in the ancient world carries the message that “life is actually sustained through death, conveying the belief that death is not an end to life but rather, is a means through which it is transformed.”¹¹

Many people see death as a road to suffering and the end of life. Wolfe’s idea that death transforms life is also a theme central to Christianity and in the person of Jesus Christ. In the gospels, Christ’s life and purpose on earth shows how that in his death, life is possible. He lives, dies as a sacrifice, is resurrected and then ascends back into heaven. Death is defeated and no longer holds condemnation for those who believe in Christ. In a similar fashion, the phoenix can be viewed as symbolizing immortality and the life-after-death embodied by Jesus Christ.

In Ryo Noda’s *Phoenix*, there are many different extended techniques used on the saxophone that are intended to evoke particular imagery or action. The piece starts with a melody that is based in D major. The five note motive utilizes the long leading tone C# to create a sense of soaring flight that lives through the major

tonality. This motive is echoed between loud and soft dynamics to represent a great bird soaring in large circles. These changes in dynamics constitute an interpretation of the music imposed by Wolfe, as these dynamic changes are not in the music.

When the bird first appears, the motive is prominent, but when he reaches the farthest distance, the motive is much softer. This interpretation is rendered throughout the opening section of the music. The piece utilizes constant changes in dynamics and speed, randomly jumping between extreme ranges of the horn or spurts of quick notes in succession to suggest an agile bird fluttering or soaring. Later on, Ryo Noda uses timbre changes on sustained notes to waiver the pitch of successive notes. This effect simulates a bird's wings flapping at different intervals of speed. The piece ends with a restatement of the original phoenix motive with a fading high C#. Ryo Noda's skill in using atonal music (music without a tonal center) shines through as he manipulates the saxophone's technique and unique tone to create an interesting mix of sounds. Together, these ideas mold an image that, in this case, is portrayed through a great soaring bird. Imagery thereby is portrayed through music.

Myths within *Six Metamorphoses*

Benjamin Britten wrote his *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* in 1951, originally for solo oboe. He was inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which told legends of main characters that went through some type of transformation. Although Britten's work does not always feature a myth involving transformation, the morality behind each character is explored. The piece was premiered at the Aldeburg Festival in 1951

performed by Joy Boughton for whom the piece was dedicated. Overall, the piece received positive reviews and has become one of the most celebrated pieces for solo oboe. I performed this work on soprano saxophone to express Britten's intention of creating, not just an image of characters, but also a story. Through carefully crafted themes and melodic motives, Britten has captured storytelling through a completely different medium. He portrays each character with a theme that is specifically designed to represent each character. This theme becomes manipulated in ways that seek to transform the original intent or elaborate on the character in question. I chose to study and perform the second, third, and fifth movements of *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* because I believed them to be contrasting examples of musical themes that define very different characters. Additionally, these movements successfully shape stories that present a character, introduce conflict, and close with a purpose, all being represented through music.

Movement II. Phaeton

The second movement of *Six Metamorphoses* is entitled "Phaeton," who was the son of the sun-god Phoebus. After doubting his true lineage, Phaeton journeyed far into the east to find the magnificent sun palace of Phoebus. Inside, Phaeton stood before his father Phoebus who was sitting on his throne. Phoebus told Phaeton that he was his true father. As proof, he gave Phaeton one wish. Phaeton asked to ride for one day on his father's chariot of the sun, but Phoebus immediately warned him of the horses' power. Phaeton would not yield to his father so he drove the chariot to the tallest heights of the world and was eventually overridden with fear as he lost control of the horses. The chariot plummeted to earth, burning land

and creature as the heat grew. To spare further destruction, Zeus struck down the chariot with a lightning bolt, and Phaeton plummeted to his death in the river Padus. This myth warns against the excesses of youth and thrill seeking.

In the music, Britten imitates a wild ride on a chariot by featuring multiple runs of eighth notes that sound dry and staccato. Multiple accents are placed sometimes sporadically throughout the movement to randomize the sound of the meter and suggest chaos. The *agitato* section near the end sparks the moment of uncontrolled turmoil as Phaeton begins his deadly plummet to earth. The articulation becomes, as one would assume, agitated: very short and aggressive. In my opinion, the *espressivo* measure with six randomly placed quarter note triplets represents Zeus' intervention. After a brief pause for silence, the ending measures softly flutter off in quick ascent to a soft ending.

Movement III. Niobe

The third movement depicts the myth of Niobe, who had fourteen children. She was so proud of them that she bragged about them to the Titan Latona who only had two. Outraged, Latona sent her two children along with Apollo and Artemis to kill all of Niobe's offspring. After being so depressed by grief, Niobe pleaded to Zeus for relief. Pitying her, Zeus transformed her into a mountain to petrify her sadness forever. A stream of tears ever flows down her mountain face. The myth suggests the influence that depression can have on a person. A mother that has lost her children can become overtaken and petrified by grief as if she were made of stone.

In the music, Britten marks the music "*piangendo*," which is the Italian word for "crying." The melodic line established in the first two measures descends slowly,

by intervals of a third and fourth. Although in a major key of Db, this slow descent simulates a weeping mother. To help portray this, I do not use vibrato in the first two statements of this theme. I wanted to capture the pure tone of the soprano without vibrato to suggest a sterile beauty. I add vibrato later, not only to make the music sound prettier and more enjoyable to listen to, but also to express the agony found in her voice as she cries. The *espressivo* and *animando* triplet section of the music could be her transformation into a mountain where the water flows down her face faster and faster as the *rubato* takes effect. After another statement of the melody, the last motive is marked *pianissimo*, which is the softest dynamic in the whole movement even before it fades. I saw this moment as a final tribute to her sorrow, almost as if a movie camera capturing the scene panned out on her mountain face.

Movement V. Narcissus

In the fifth movement of Britten's *Six Metamorphoses*, Narcissus is the character being depicted. According to the myth, Narcissus was a very handsome man who was loved for his beauty by women and men. He adored himself and marveled at his good looks. One day, he stopped by a pool of water to get a drink. After he bent over the water's edge, he fell in love with the image in the water, not realizing it was his reflection. He pondered over how he could be united with his true love, but each attempt at touching the image caused ripples in the pool. Unable to be joined with his "lover," Narcissus died at the pool's edge from sorrow and was transformed into a flower with white petals. This myth speaks to the dangers of vanity and being overly absorbed in self-love. In the music, Narcissus' reflection is

personified through the alternating melodic lines over the mid-range of the instrument. The entire melodic phrase is stated in the first nine measures of music. There are some expressive motives such as in measures three and five, as well as trill-like passages in measures two, four, seven and eight. These different motives come together to form an eerie melody that almost expands through its soft elaboration.

The beginning of the second melodic statement in measure ten is marked *espressivo*, implying that the reflection has been discovered and Narcissus' emotions are beginning to take hold of him. In measure eleven we see the first establishment of the reflection. Britten symbolizes a mirror image by taking the original melody and inverting it in the higher range of the instrument. This reflection also sounds like an alternate copy because the reflection's statement is always very soft. These alternating motives oscillate back and forth, getting closer and closer to the mid-range of the instrument. They finally clash on a fortissimo trill between a C# and D, which are the two notes on saxophone and the oboe that represent the distinct bridge between the lower and upper registers. The ending of the movement is very soft with small hints of the reflective theme floating through the lament. The once narcissistic prince is transformed into a flower to remain for all eternity.

Christianity in the Context of Mythology

While myths may be a source for a higher truth, these legends are only part of the tradition and origins for many different cultural beliefs. Throughout history, there have been many different cultures and groups that use multiple sources for

their spiritual beliefs and practices, aside from those rooted in mythology. In the Christian tradition, different sources for belief include prayer, dreams, visions, inspiration, and instruction. Prayer can be seen in many forms. Talking to God can be done in groups or alone, out loud or silently, through speech, music, or listening. Christians over the centuries have experienced dreams that reveal certain events or give advice. Prior to Jesus' birth, God sent an angel to inform Joseph in a dream that he should wed Mary who was pregnant by means of the Holy Spirit. After Jesus' birth, the Lord again came to Joseph in a dream that he should take his family to Egypt to protect them from King Herod. Where some dreams are direct instruction by God, others may be more ambiguous and need translation, which later serve as useful resources when dangers are foretold. Visions appear normally when people are awake and have the same function as dreams do, but may often be more convincing.¹² One of the most well-known biblical visions came to Saul of Tarsus when he was on the road to Damascus. Saul had spent years of his life condemning and killing Christians, believing that their belief in Jesus' ascent was blasphemy. Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus revealing his presence and mission for Saul. Saul was so convinced that he transformed his life completely, changing his name to Paul, and becoming the most prominent spokesperson for the Christian faith during the first century. Instruction and inspiration can certainly come from dreams and visions, but may also be carried through mediators of the faith. When Christians experience truth through God's direct intervention, that message is passed on to more people, who continue to share that wisdom with future generations.¹³

Myths are stories based on historical events. Raw fiction is not an accurate description of myth. With every myth, there is an event, vision, dream, or idea that was real to the beholders: so real that it carried on and on through history being shaped and molded into the final product that today we call a myth. Thomas presents this idea well stating, "When a religious faith has thrived across the centuries, such success can be accepted as evidence that the faith's beliefs and practices are authentic- that the religion's tenets are true and everlasting. A long-standing, unchanging tradition can offer people a sense of security as they attempt to cope with a turbulent, puzzling world."¹⁴ While I do not stand on the idea that every religion is true because it has lasted so long, I do believe that certain principles or events that religions are grounded in are true. This is an idea that is consistent with mythology. I propose that with every myth, there is a connection being made, not only to a particular truth, but also to an underlying concept that exists within all cultures.

The idea of creation, for example, is an important topic within the theologies of Christianity and Native Americans. Christianity emphasizes creation as a specific event that arose as a divine plan. Native American traditions may simply view creation as "an ecosystem present in a definable place."¹⁵ They are not as concerned with time as they are the beauty and function of the creation they live in. Christianity uses time as a starting point where Divine Intelligence first set the cosmos in motion. Within the confines of mythology, we can see how the creation story has helped build different practices and uses for specific cultures. Additionally, one can examine all of the elements within creation that Native

Americans believe are divine. Earth, sky, water, fire, plants, animals, and humans are all real things. They are factual and true. Similarly, other religions such as Christianity started from real people who lived real lives that have been successfully and prolifically documented in books. Translation and time does not take away from the facts, the events, and the people. These aspects play a role in the specific beliefs and practices of all religions, but my point is that the original truth was real. The inspiration and basis of different myths were real. The embellishments and opinions take these stories in different directions. We spend today arguing over the falsehoods of mythology and tradition, when we should really be studying the truths that spawned them.

Conclusion

Music and mythology have co-existed for centuries. Music has become a fundamental part of the human race. We use music to tell myths and utilize myths to enhance music. The two entities, myth and music, function beautifully in the purposes they were created for: inspiring people through storytelling and entertainment. Myths and music can be found at the heart of any civilization. Mythology is rooted in history, remaining consistent with the ideals of other civilizations, even when their religious beliefs can be so different. But with all cultures, mythological thinking and expression stems from the necessities of action. "The transition to action is a process in which mythology- the imaginative filling out and transformation of experience into a dramatic struggle of personalized forces- is necessarily evolved," states William Herberg.¹⁶ He claims that every important

social movement is rooted in faith. Scientific facts may help the cause, but reality by itself does not fuel a movement. Morality, myth, belief, and ideals drive such action. He says, "The useable elements of factual experience are therefore transformed, filled out, elaborated into an appropriate mythology which serves to idealize, rationalize, and justify the aims of action."¹⁷ Without faith, advancement will cease to exist, and the inspiration for society will be lost in time.

End Notes

1. Calame, *Greek Mythology*, 6.
2. Ibid., 7.
3. Davis, *Don't Know Much*, 182.
4. Calame, *Greek Mythology*, 5.
5. Davis, *Don't Know Much*, 247.
6. Knowlton, *Maya Creation Myths*, 1.
7. Ibid., 2.
8. Bulfinch, "The Age of Fables."
9. Deut. 32: 11-12 (New International Version)
10. Mal. 4: 2 (New International Version)
11. Wolfe, *Spiritual Power of Nonviolence*, 182.
12. Thomas, *Manitou and God*. 17.
13. Ibid., 12-13.
14. Ibid., 15.
15. Deloria, *God is Red*, 78.
16. Herberg, *Faith Enacted as History*, 188.
17. Ibid., 189.

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Senior Honors Recital

Music and Mythology

Chris Jones

Alto and Soprano saxophone

Featuring Dr. Galit Gertsenzon on Piano

1. "Divertimento" - Roger Boutry
Chris Jones alto, Galit Gertsenzon piano
2. "Phoenix" - Ryo Noda
Chris Jones alto
3. "Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Op. 49" - Benjamin Britten
Chris Jones soprano
4. "Prélude, Cadence Et Finale" - Alfred Desenclos
Chris Jones alto, Galit Gertsenzon piano

Senior Honors Recital

Chris Jones
Music and Mythology

Divertimento

by
Roger Boutry

Roger Boutry is a talented French composer, conductor, and pianist. He studied at the Paris Conservatory at the age of eleven and by age twenty-two had won the Prix de Rome (a prestigious scholarship for arts students). His music is most well known for his challenging piano parts and expressive melodies. His composition *Divertimento* is no exception. Divided into three movements, the saxophone and piano have challenging rhythms that play off one another throughout the piece.

The second movement is influenced by Jazz and has the characteristics of a Jazz Ballad. The music is expressive and allows the soloist to take some liberties with the tempo to fully capture the excitement. The second half of the second movement features the saxophone in a solo cadenza. This unmetered section allows the soloist to brandish technical proficiency over a wide range of the instrument. Additionally, privilege is given to fully express musicality through rubato and dynamic contrast.

The end of the cadenza flows right into the fast third movement with a piano interlude that states the new melody. The saxophone enters again displaying accomplished technique. This movement is also challenging in the fact that there are several metric changes throughout the entire movement. The play between the saxophone and piano is a bit humorous, but quite challenging at the same time. A few more flourishing sextuplet runs in the saxophone build excitement towards a climactic ending.

Phoenix

by
Ryo Noda

Ryo Noda's composition *Phoenix* is based on the myth of a sacred firebird. Found in the Hindu scripture known as the Rig Veda, the phoenix is a magnificent bird of fire that resurrects itself to embody the continuity of life. Flying from the sun, it comes down to earth and lives anywhere from 500 to 1000 years. Near the

end of its life, it builds itself a nest and then ignites. Both the bird and nest are burned down to ash and a young phoenix is reborn from the ashes. In some versions of the myth, the new phoenix preserves the ashes of its former life in its egg of myrrh and then takes it to the Egyptian city of Heliopolis (meaning "sun-city" in Greek). The following is a description of the phoenix by the Roman poet Ovid.

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The Egyptians originally thought of the phoenix as a stork-like bird called a "benu," which was closely associated with the rising sun (giving new life each day) and the Egyptian sun-god Ra. In Greek mythology, the phoenix was imagined as more of an eagle that lived in Phoenicia next to a well. The Greek sun-god Helios would stop his chariot (the sun) next to the well to listen to the bird's beautiful song.

The most significant association with the phoenix has been its symbolism for rebirth and immortality. In Christian art and literature, the sunbird has been represented by an eagle to symbolize spiritual ascension. In the Hebrew book of Deuteronomy, Moses talks of how God leads and cares for His people: "like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The Lord alone led him; no foreign god was with him" (Deut 32: 11-12). This passage implies that when suffering and death may disrupt a person's life, the Lord will carry them to safety and ultimately eternal life. Additionally, a passage in the book of Malachi reads: "the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings" (Mal 4: 2). This references the regenerative powers the phoenix possesses in addition to the ascension to new life.

In Christianity, the Gospel tells the narrative of Christ's life and purpose on earth. He lives, dies as a sacrifice, is resurrected and then ascends back into heaven. In a similar fashion, the phoenix can be viewed as symbolizing immortality and the life-after-death embodied by Jesus Christ.

Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, Op. 49

by

Benjamin Britten

Benjamin Britten wrote his *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* in 1951 originally for solo oboe. He was inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which told legends of main characters that went through some type of transformation. Although Britten's work does not always feature a myth involving transformation, the morality behind each character is explored. The piece was premiered at the Aldeburg Festival in 1951 performed by Joy Boughton for whom the piece was dedicated. Overall, the piece received positive reviews and has become one of the most celebrated pieces for solo oboe.

II. Phaeton

The second movement of *Six Metamorphoses* is entitled "Phaeton," who was the son of the sun-god Phoebus. After doubting his true lineage, Phaeton journeyed far into the east to find the magnificent sun palace of Phoebus. Inside, Phaeton stood before Phoebus on the throne and Phoebus told Phaeton that he was his true father. As proof, he gave Phaeton one wish. Phaeton asked to ride for one day on his father's chariot of the sun, but Phoebus immediately warned him of the horses' power. Phaeton would not yield so he drove the chariot to the tallest heights of the world and was eventually overridden with fear and the wildness of the horses. The chariot plummeted to earth, burning land and creature as the heat grew. To spare further destruction, Zeus struck down the chariot with a lightning bolt and Phaeton plummeted to his death in the river Padus. This myth warns against the excesses of youth and thrill seeking.

III. Niobe

The third movement depicts the myth of Niobe, who had fourteen children. She was so proud of them that she bragged about them to the Titan Latona who only had two. Outraged, Latona sent her two children along with Apollo and Artemis to kill all of Niobe's offspring. After being so depressed by grief, Niobe pleaded to Zeus for relief. Pitying her, Zeus transformed her into a mountain to petrify her sadness forever. A stream of tears ever flows down her mountain face. In the music, Britten marks the music "piangendo," which is the Italian word for "crying." The melodic line established in the first two measures descends slowly, simulating a weeping mother. The myth suggests the influence that depression can have on a person. A mother that has lost her children can become overtaken and petrified by grief.

V. Narcissus

In the fifth movement of Britten's *Six Metamorphoses*, Narcissus is the character being depicted. According to the myth, Narcissus was a very handsome man who was loved for his beauty by women and men. He adored himself and marveled at his good looks. One day, he stopped by a pool of water to get a drink. After he bent over the water's edge, he fell in love with his own reflection not realizing it was his. He pondered over how he could be united with his true love, but each attempt at touching the image caused ripples in the pool. Unable to be joined, Narcissus died at the pool's edge from sorrow and was transformed into a flower with white petals. This myth speaks to the dangers of being overly absorbed in self-love. In the music, the reflection Narcissus is personified through the alternating melodic lines over the mid-range of the instrument. As one theme is played, it is inverted higher with a change in dynamic level. These alternating motives oscillate back and forth getting closer and closer until they finally clash on a fortissimo trill. The ending of the movement is soft, signifying Narcissus' death and transformation.

Prélude, Cadence Et Finale

by

Alfred Desenclos

Alfred Desenclos was a French classical composer. He was known for his expressive music and complex compositional techniques. His composition *Prélude, Cadence Et Finale* was originally written for alto saxophone and piano, but was later arranged for orchestra in 1997 by Russell Peterson. The work is a challenging piece of saxophone repertoire divided into three distinct sections. Each part is to be played seamlessly without interruption as the saxophonist and pianist explore the technical, lyrical, and dynamic ranges of their instruments.

The first section "Prélude" features a haunting melody brought to life through the use of rubato. Even by the third measure, the saxophone has nearly covered the full, normal range of the instrument. In measure fifteen, the piano introduces the sixteenth note theme of the piece, which is then picked up by the saxophone. A piano interlude brings closure to the first movement as the saxophonist starts an elaborate cadenza.

The second section "Cadence" allows the saxophonist to explore the musical range of the instrument and the freedom to play musically and technically. This exciting portion of music leads into the final section entitled "Finale."

The first part of this section is fast and rhythmically challenging for both performers. The next part is more expressive and brings back the melody from the "Prélude." More technical passages pass between the saxophone and piano leading

to a suspenseful section that the saxophonist plays out of rhythm. After the saxophone's climactic statement of the melody for the last time, the piece ends brilliantly and technically.

Program notes by Chris Jones

References

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